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Sermon preached at Ebenezer, Clapham, by the Pastor, Mr. J. Delves, on Wednesday evening, December 7th, 1938. Text. Hosea 2, vs. 19 & 20.

"And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the Lord."

This prophet Hosea, I understand, was the first of the twelve minor prophets, whose testimonies we have recorded later in the Word of God. They are called the minor prophets, not because of any inferiority in the nature of their prophesying, but on account of the brevity of their writings. There were nine of these minor prophets who prophesied before the Babylonish captivity, and three who prophesied after the return of the Jews from their captivity --- the three last in this book, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Hosea appears to have prophesied about the same time, and was contemporary with Isaiah, Amos, Micah and several others, and he seems to have prophesied for about the space of sixty years. Therefore there can be but a very small portion of his prophecy recorded, but just that amount that the Holy Ghost saw fit to be as an inspired prophecy, to be made useful to the Church of God in ages to come. The language is concise but abounding in difficult symbols and metaphors. At this time the whole land appears to have woefully degenerated, to have departed from the worship of the living God, and the predictions were mostly directed unto the ten tribes under the names of Israel and Ephraim. The land had become polluted and the people idolatrous, shameless in their wickedness which is exposed in language which we need grace rightly to perceive and understand. This seems to have been the case with the kings, the rulers, the priests and the people. They had departed from the living God to serve idols, and the purport of the prophecy seems to be to show that God would deal in solemn judgment with these people for

their sins and wickedness, which were of a peculiarly heinous character. The whole land became desolate, in a corrupt condition, yet notwithstanding this there were a few who feared God in those days. Not only so, but these people, notwithstanding their woeful departures, still stood in covenant relationship with God, and though there are predictions of solemn chastenings and the heart wickedness of Ephraim is discovered and disclosed, yet, notwithstanding this, there are many promises of mercy and grace to them yet to be fulfilled, but which have an undoubted application to the spiritual Church of the living God. Therefore we perceive, we read through these prophecies, that the same hand that chastens in judgment heals in mercy, and the same God Who wounds and afflicts for sin, heals in love and restores in loving-kindness. The same power that lays low lifts up again, and the same God Who kills makes alive. Therefore the promise goes forth, "I will bring it health and cure, and I will ..... reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth." O, what a mercy to have any ground to hope that that will be our case. God deals in judgment and mercy with His people, and He will chasten them for their sins; nevertheless, His loving-kindness He will not take from them, nor suffer His faithfulness to fail. He will be true to His Word and true to His love, therefore He says earlier in this chapter, "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." God will establish His covenant with His people, He will make it known to them, He will make the covenant with them, "even the sure mercies of David," so that they shall no more call Him Baali but Ishi, signifying an address of affection.

In the words I have read we have a wonderful, an amazing promise,

which we need grace rightly to enter into and understand. The Lord God of Israel says to His people, "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord." A betrothing, naturally speaking, as you all know well, is a mutual contract or agreement between two to enter into the marriage relationship, an act consistent and proper and right in the sight of God, owned in Holy Scripture as His ordinance and an estate wherein two thus joined together may, as the Lord is pleased to grant His favour to them, enjoy a mutual sharing of lifes sorrows and joys. "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled." O but if we carry this into spiritual things and, for a moment, endeavour to consider a divine relationship of such an order and nature as this, how wonderful it is! We can only speak of it as an act of amazing, condescending love and grace to poor sinners; the love of God manifested toward the objects of His choice, in uniting them unto Himself, in joining them to the Son of God, and in owning them under such an appellation, even as His chosen bride.

"The Bridegroom of the chosen bride,  
Who loves her to the end."

Thus the people of God are favoured at times to view a divine relationship existing or subsisting between the glorious, blessed, incarnate Son of God and all His people redeemed by precious blood, chosen of Him e'er time began, thus becoming bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh;

"Our Counsellor, our Guide,  
Our Brother, and our Friend;  
The Bridegroom of the chosen bride,  
Who loves her to the end."

O, we should do well, had we grace to contemplate this, the mystical, indissoluble union between Christ and His Church. They are spoken of as

one, joined together, illustrated by the joining together of husband and wife, a relationship very near, very tender; and so it is, immeasurably more than we can conceive; the Lord Jesus Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, His Church the chosen bride.

In this word the promise runs thus, "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever." Now I believe it would be quite orthodox to speak in the first place of what we might call a divine betrothment; that is to say we believe that there was a betrothing of the Church to Christ in eternity. Long before Jehovah laid the foundations of the earth, His people, His Church were given to Him, being predestinated, "chosen in Him," as we read in the Epistle to the Ephesians, "before the foundation of the world." Wonderful to contemplate this! There was, to use this figure, a betrothment in the eternal councils of love and peace toward poor sinful men. They were chosen, they were given, they were united in that covenant of which the Scriptures speak as being "ordered in all things, and sure," an everlasting covenant; and the Scriptures define the properties of it as being the covenant of life, a covenant of peace, a covenant of promise. All this is embraced in that covenant, and every vessel of mercy is there in a covenant made, we believe, according to God's Holy Word, mutually made, contracted and entered into between Father, Son and Holy Ghost, whereby this wonderful, amazing thing was agreed upon, the Son of God ~~to~~ therein and thereby agreeing in covenant with His Father to this thing, to take into union with Himself, to receive, to embrace this Church and to accept her in that relationship, even as joined to Himself. Therefore, for this purpose and reason according to the covenant, He fulfilled every stipulation that was necessary to be made in order for the whole design to be effected according to the Word of God. We read, "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the

law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Let us go back there first, my friends, as far as we can, and consider the divine mind of Jehovah in relation to this wonderful covenant and agreement; there the Son of God did, as it were, embrace in the arms of divine, covenant, sovereign love, every vessel of mercy, and there they stood in union with Him; and the eternal mind, foreseeing what would take place, and how that all would fall in their federal head and would become lost, ruined, undone and vile, did, notwithstanding, condescend to pay the price that justice demanded for their redemption, and to wash, sanctify and clothe them with His own blessed, perfect righteousness, so that the Church of God, as redeemed by precious blood, stands joined in covenant union with the Lord Jesus, "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing," washed and clothed by the precious blood of the Lamb of God. Thus I believe it is right to say there was a betrothment there.

Then may we not come to the dispensation of God toward the objects of His love in time when that betrothment is made manifest unto them, and when they are brought experimentally, by the effectual operations of the Holy Ghost, to realise this; when by the discoveries and communications of the love of Jesus to their souls they are brought and favoured to realise and to know that that betrothment was made with them, that they are embraced in it, and that the covenant is made on their behalf; and when these divine communications are made to the Lord's people in time in their experience, that is the covenant which is made in eternity, (if such a word can be logical;) it is that covenant which is everlasting in the nature of it, being made with them. Thus the promise runs, "Incline your ear and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Now when there is any gracious application of

divine mercy to a poor sinner's conscience, that is the making of that divine covenant with him. In effect, the Lord says to such a one, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." I believe that this has respect to the awakening and calling and convicting and humbling and teaching of the people of God; all evidencing their interest in that eternal bond of covenant union which can never be broken, because they were betrothed in eternity. We read in the prophecy of Ezekiel of the poor, wretched infant who was cast out into the open field. But what did the Lord say? "When I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was a time of love; and I spread My skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness; I... .. entered into a covenant with thee, ..... and thou becamest, ~~becamest~~ Mine." Now that seems like a spiritual betrothment, <sup>does it not?</sup> ~~doesn't it?~~ It seems like the coming of the Lord to a poor sinner cast out into the open field in his unregeneracy, yet sovereign, free mercy comes to him. "I passed by thee and saw thee when thou wast in thy blood, and said, Live. Yea, when thou wast in thy blood I saw thee and said unto thee, Live. And thou becamest Mine." When the Lord speaks a word like that He speaks it with power into the subject, drawing every warm, fervent, living, affectionate desire after the Lord Jesus. Faith goes out to Him, you take your burden of sin, unworthiness, guilt and ruin and everything to Him, and you would love Him if you could and sometimes you do. This is all an evidence of that union that was made in the divine plan; every manifestation of the Saviour's love and grace made to poor sinners evidences this. "I made a covenant with thee." "I have spread My skirt over thee." This is figurative language, of course, describing the covering the Lord provides for His people who stand before Him with no righteousness of their own. "I will betroth thee unto Me."

But may we not consider this in another aspect and go forward to a day yet to come when there will be an open and full consummation of all this, and when the Lord will openly, fully, unitedly and wholly embrace and acknowledge His people as His own, and, as the heavenly Bridegroom, will receive the chosen bride? This was the day that John saw in the wonderful vision, when he saw a new heaven and a new earth, and when he saw the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom, coming down from God out of heaven, and the Church of God too, like as a bride adorned for her husband. This is the time too when that song will be sung that we were reading of, "Let us be glad and rejoice ..... for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her it was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen ..... for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."

Now in the word I have just read we have the duration of the divine betrothment of the Church to Christ. It is to be for ever: "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever." No separation here, no divorce court proceedings. The purposes of God must stand for ever.

"Once in Him in Him for ever;  
Thus the eternal covenant stands."

It is not to be a temporary matter, manifestations of mercy and love for a time and then to cease, but it is to be for ever. It was in the divine covenant from everlasting and it will be to everlasting, and especially will this be true when the whole Church of God triumphant, redeemed by blood, shall come forth, as we read, out of great tribulation with their robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Then for ever and ever the song will be, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood." It is to be for ever; and when a poor sinner is favoured to feel a little inkling, a little hope, a little

' earnest of this in his own heart, what a comfort it is! How sacred, how solemn it is to contemplate! For ever and ever; no end. It will be one of the two things with us all, either everlasting love or everlasting misery; one of the two things. "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever." O, but some of us may say, 'I feel doubtful, dark, confused in **relation** to my own particular case.' None but the Lord Himself can settle the matter for you. No creature can, no minister can, only inasmuch as the Lord may speak through an instrument.

"Though God's election is a truth,  
 Small comfort there I see,  
 Till I am told, God's own mouth  
 That He has chosen me;"

then I shall know it for my soul's peace and comfort. O, what a mercy, friends, it is to have ~~the~~ communications, real communications from God, is it not?; to have a real religion, to know the Son of God by faith, to have a divine faith fixed upon Him, to be found relying upon Him. I do believe that there are times in one's spiritual experience when the Lord makes this great matter known unto him. He bursts through the clouds of darkness and bondage and sets the soul at liberty, speaks the sealing word, says in substance to one, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," opens before the view of faith the amazing, wonderful scene of redeeming love in the Person of the Saviour, and gives a poor thing to realise that all his sins are put away. Then he is, as we speak, swallowed up in love and blood. O, how wonderful it is to have a word from God to confirm us in relation to a personal interest in these wonderful realities! And the Lord's people realise this. It is no myth, no fancy of our brain. The Spirit of adoption, by the Lord's merciful and gracious operation within, is known by the Lord's living family. There may have been a spot in your life when you were favoured to look up in faith and say, 'My God, my Father, my Jesus, my Friend.' You would not distrust

Him, would you? You would not doubt Him ~~at~~ such a time as that? You cannot doubt Him. The Lord can and does give His people what we term an assurance; that is a sweet realisation in their own conscience that they are children of God. "The Spirit Itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

But the manner in which this wonderful thing is to be is here related: it shall be "in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies." Then I believe we may look upon this word righteousness, here, both in relation to the action itself, and also the covering which is provided for the chosen bride. The action in itself is a righteous one, a covenant decree, for the covenant is a covenant of life and truth. All God's ways, all God's works, all God's decrees and all His purposes are righteous, therefore the choice of the whole family of God is a righteous choice, the gift a righteous gift; and the means whereby they are prepared and fitted to enter into and enjoy this relationship a righteous means, salvation being a divine accomplishment in a way wherein all the divine perfections are honoured. But more particularly may we not say that the Church is betrothed unto Him in righteousness in relation to the adornment, the covering which the Bridegroom has provided --- that is, His own righteousness which is spoken of as a covering, a robe of righteousness that shall adorn the Church, the bride of Christ? "To her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen ..... for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." What is this fine linen but the perfect obedience, the perfect and full obedience of the incarnate Son of God to the whole law of God? This was all in the covenant; and not only this, but it was an obedience unto death. Not only did He obey and honour and fulfil all the terms of the law, but He suffered the penalty as though He had committed all the sins. This is a wonderful doctrine ----- imputation. They were all laid upon Him; thus He was

made sin, but they were washed away, completely washed away, cast into the depths of the sea, the sea of <sup>the</sup> unfathomable, infinite merit of the Redeemer, for there is no other sea but that. They were drowned in His blood. Thus we see the Church pure, without spot, by virtue of the obedience of the Saviour. Thus, being prepared, she is adorned, clothed and covered with His own righteousness. It is in this way that the Church is betrothed unto Him and received as a fit bride for the heavenly Bridegroom. But not only is this in righteousness, but it is in judgment. According to my own feeling, I would take this to have relation to all the wise dispensations toward His people in time, all His dealings with them, all they pass through. Judgment, wise judgment. The Psalmist said, you know, that he could sing of mercy and judgment; and the people of God, I believe, when they are passing through these things --- judgments --- though afflictive in themselves, are brought to realise even in judgments, afflictive dispensations and trials, the love of God, the love of God in Christ made known unto them, revealed unto them in judgments. Has not the Lord ever come to you in a time of sorrow, grief, trouble, affliction, some dispensation, perhaps a chastening in itself? and while you have been under the rod thus revealed Himself and smiled into your soul and sanctified the affliction to your soul's good? He brings His people from under the rod into the bond of the covenant. Thus He has betrothed them. He will betroth them unto Him in judgment, expressive of His wisdom; not only of His wise choice of them, but His wise dealings with them, bringing them to realise, too, that every stroke of His rod was necessary for the purging of their crime, to bring them into more conformity with Him. Wise judgments! Perhaps some of you more advanced in years may be able to look back upon some dispensations very dark in themselves at the time, so dark that you could not begin to see what the issue of them would be, but now, it may be, you can look back and say, 'They

were all in God's gracious judgments unto me; they were all necessary for me; He had a wise purpose in them, and all to this end, working together for good to bring me to Himself.' In all probability in some of these things, this union, the taking of you and your case and your trouble into His hands has been a betrothment. He has taken you to Himself, owned you as His child, and you have felt the relationship in your own experience. "In loving-kindness, and in mercies, ..... and in faithfulness."

"In loving-kindness." I take this to be the Lord's love to His people manifested in a tender regard for them. The Scripture speaks of the Lord's loving-kindness, manifestations in a practical way of His love unto His people. The Psalmist says in Psalm 103, "Who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies." The Church in Isaiah <sup>too</sup> 26, could break out and say, "I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord," The Psalmist, reviewing them in Psalm 107, would say, "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." His people are drawn by His loving-kindness." "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee;" expressive of all His actions and dealings with His people in drawing them out of their former condition of sin, slavery, bondage and captivity, and drawing them by the effectual operations of His Spirit into a gracious experience and knowledge of the love of God; an experience of it in their own case. "We love Him because He first loved us."

"In mercies;" mercies innumerable; His mercies from the beginning, everlasting mercies. This His people <sup>realise</sup> ~~relate~~ from time to time. And "in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the Lord." Faithfulness. The Lord will be faithful to every article of that covenant, faithful to every promise that He has made in it, and faithful to everything held forth in it in relation to the dispensation of the blessings of it. Therefore His poor people, as they have grace, can put their trust in Him. He is worthy

of their trust, He is a faithful God. "In faithfulness."

"And thou shalt know the Lord." This is an important clause in the new covenant, is it not? "They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them." Therefore it is brought in here, "They shall know the Lord;" and if in divine mercy the Lord has brought us to any understanding in this, any knowledge of Himself even if in a faint degree, if we have had any revelation of the Person of the blessed Redeemer to our souls, if we have looked by faith upon Him and believed in Him, if we have been favoured to roll ourselves upon Him, stand upon that Foundation, it evidences and bears it's own witness to this divine betrothment, and is the proof of that eternal union between Christ and His Church, the Bridegroom and the bride. The word is mentioned three times, "I will betroth thee;" three times to express the certainty of it and the sure fulfilment of all that the Lord has promised, and the effectual accomplishment of all that He has said He will do, to the eternal joy and felicity of all those embraced in the bond of the divine covenant of eternal love. Also we might make a suggestion that, mentioned as it is three times, we may look upon it as expressive of the mutual agreement of the three Persons of the blessed Trinity, all of one mind, not only in relation to the choice but the way in which the salvation shall be accomplished, the way in which they shall be taught by the Spirit of God, and the effectual ingathering of them in that day, and the receiving of them into eternal, everlasting glory. Then they shall know the Lord in a sweeter and higher and more glorious manner than can be in this mortal state. O what a mercy to see a beauty in Jesus, to have the chords of our spiritual affections so touched as to run after Him with a love toward Him, and to have that one thing before us, to know that we were chosen in Him and are partakers of those divine, eternal blessings that He will impart to His people.  
Amen.